



Healthy Snacks Win Over Local Youth Sports League

Intervention Summary

Youth sports leagues and recreation programs have the potential to influence an entire generation about healthy fitness and nutrition behaviors. Sadly, the days of orange wedges and water at youth sporting events are being compromised by the marketing and convenience of less healthy options. NEOP-funded staff witnessed first-hand the unhealthy snacks and beverages children were offered at games and practices. This inspired the need for providing the league with information about more appropriate healthy snacks and beverages. The solution was the development of a simple, bilingual handout for parents and coaches emphasizing the importance of proper nutrition and healthy beverages for children participating in soccer.

The pilot version of the handout was drafted by non-NEOP staff and presented to the American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) Board of Directors, coaches and parent volunteers. They recognized that unhealthy snacks and sugar-sweetened beverages were becoming a problem in Desert Hot Springs, where 35% of children living in Desert Hot Springs are overweight and/or obese (HARC Data). Aside from the alarming childhood obesity rates, other concerns included the large amounts of trash left on the fields after games and practices. This year, the handout was included in parent packets for every child enrolled in the 2015 soccer season in Desert Hot Springs. The snack handout has been revised to meet NEOP branding guidelines, and has been approved for local use. The new version of the handout has the potential of being adopted by other youth sports leagues, including more AYSO regions.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

Luckily, the educational handout was such a great concept that it was easy to implement and distribute with the help of the Desert Hot Springs AYSO Board of Directors and coaches. It filled an immediate need to address the overwhelming volume

of unhealthy foods and beverages, and supported the league's stance on mentoring young athletes to become healthy role models. This may be the first step in adopting a more permanent policy in the future regarding concessions and parent-provided team snacks for games and practices.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

Continuing efforts with the Desert Hot Springs AYSO will reach far beyond nutrition education materials. The collaboration has led to the planning of supporting activities to reinforce the messaging in the handout. Plans are being established for nutrition education booths at soccer games to distribute a variety of resources, provide taste testings of spa water and fresh fruits and vegetables, and offer Rethink Your Drink and nutrition classes to the teams. Working with the coaches, the goal is to encourage parents to provide healthier snacks on a voluntary basis, while the region considers a formal food and beverage policy.

The Desert Hot Springs AYSO has also committed that 25% of the foods sold in their snack bar will be healthier options during this fall's soccer season. The translation of the handout to Spanish has allowed the reach to more families, who can also benefit from the information. The handout has the potential to reach other youth sports leagues, such as basketball and baseball, where similar problems exist with the consumption of unhealthy snacks and beverages. The efforts of the Desert Hot Springs AYSO to promote healthy snacks and beverages via the handout, nutrition displays at games, and healthy snack bar options, can lead to a culture and mindset change within coaches and parents, which can create a healthier environment for all participants and spectators. Lastly, the handout has been submitted to the state for inclusion into the NEOPB allowable resource list, to support healthy snack policy changes with youth organizations across California.

Contact information about this Narrative

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